



Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

April 26, 2021

RE: LD 983, “An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Promote Land Conservation, Working Waterfronts, Water Access and Outdoor Recreation” & LD 687 “An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Promote the Conservation of Land, Working Waterfronts, Water Access and Outdoor Recreation”

Dear Senator Breen, Representative Pierce, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony in support of LD 983, An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Promote Land Conservation, Working Waterfronts, Water Access and Outdoor Recreation, and LD 687, An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Promote the Conservation of Land, Working Waterfronts, Water Access and Outdoor Recreation, on behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members and supporters.

Maine Audubon supports the entirety of these bills, including funding to support much-needed infrastructure improvements to Maine’s State Parks, but we’d like to specifically address our support for funding for the Land for Maine’s Future (LMF) program. Also, notably, while we are grateful for the inclusion of LMF funding in LD 687, we do not believe that the funding amount in the bill is sufficient. Instead, we recommend bonding for at least \$60 million to be issued over 5 years, in order to accommodate the advance planning and funding necessary for projects that maximize public and natural resource benefits. This funding, at that level, is needed now. The LMF program is nearly out of funding.

In 2019, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)¹ issued a staggering report: approximately 1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction—many within just a few decades—which is more than ever before in human history. The average abundance of native species in most major land-based habitats has fallen by at least 20% (mostly since 1900), and more than 40% of amphibian species are facing possible extinction.

The report is particularly relevant to policy decision-making because the report’s authors ranked—for the first time at this scale and based on a thorough analysis of available evidence—the five direct drivers of this unprecedented change in nature: (1) changes in land and sea use; (2)

¹ IPBES is an independent intergovernmental body comprised of more than 130 member Governments, including the United States. Established in 2012, IPBES provides policymakers with objective scientific assessment about the state of knowledge regarding the planet’s biodiversity, ecosystems, and the contributions they made to people. They also provide tools and methods to protect and sustainably use these vital natural assets.

direct exploitation of species; (3) climate change; (4) pollution; and (5) invasive species.

LMF addresses the number one direct driver of species extinction: changes in land use. The program provides funding to purchase lands in fee or to secure conservation easements that ensure that the land is conserved in perpetuity. These lands are open for the public to enjoy, provide community benefits, and contribute to the local economy. LMF also has a long tradition of preserving working farms, forests, and waterfront, totaling over 300,000 acres in Maine to date. These working lands, particularly working forests, strike a good balance between supporting our working lands economy and conserving important habitat. Maine Audubon's Forestry for Maine Birds program, which is being implemented across the state, demonstrates that bird conservation can be integrated in active forest management.

LMF has a strong history of conserving parcels at a scale that supports forest management and appreciable habitat. In Somerset County, the 8,159-acre Cold Stream Forest encompasses critical wildlife habitats, including more than 3,000 acres of deer wintering areas and seven wild brook trout ponds. The project is owned and managed by the Bureau of Parks and Lands for multiple uses, including forestry. The Crocker Mountain parcel, also managed by the Bureau of Parks and Lands, but in Franklin County, includes high elevation areas that are home to the Northeast's most imperiled songbird, the Bicknell's Thrush, and cold-water streams that host the endangered Roaring Brook Mayfly.

While LMF projects cannot stem all threats to wildlife, they provide an important part of the puzzle that ensures the full suite of Maine's wildlife and habitats are conserved into the future, providing a permanent home for wildlife, opportunities for nature-based tourism, and places for spiritual renewal.

Without such conservation efforts, new development will creep across the landscape. Residential and commercial development, including roads and other human activity, not only destroys habitat, but can alter when, where, and how animals move between habitats. Fragmented habitat limits natural dispersal of young animals, isolates populations, reduces genetic exchange, and lowers population levels over time. Roads and roadside areas are often avoided by wildlife, create barriers to movement, and can be fatal for many species as they attempt to cross. Undersized and poorly functioning culverts located where roads cross streams and other waterways can restrict movement of aquatic and semi-aquatic species. Chemical runoff and sedimentation from roads and yards pollute waterways. These chemicals can accumulate in both aquatic and terrestrial species, to a point where the chemicals compromise species' health or alter their behavior, and can create algal blooms that are toxic to fish and other aquatic life. Building roads, houses, commercial developments, and utility corridors often introduces invasive species into a region, which can have devastating impacts on native species.

LMF and other land conservation efforts are an antidote to the unintended consequences of development and one of Maine's best bets to stem the tide of habitat loss and degradation, as well as species decline and extinction. While Maine Audubon would never advocate for a single conservation strategy, LMF employs multiple strategies and is a top priority.

It bears noting that concerns have been expressed about the tradition of allowing hunting and trapping on LMF properties, so long as the activity is allowed under local, state, and federal laws (and not on working farm or waterfront properties). Maine Audubon supports these activities on LMF properties. We believe it is important for the program to be inclusive to the many ways that Maine people enjoy the outdoors, and limiting hunting can, in some circumstances, actually

lead to unintended habitat degradation.

For example, not allowing deer hunting in some areas can lead to significant population increases. An overabundance of deer can lead to over-browsing, which may diminish understory cover for species that rely on that habitat and limit regeneration of young trees. Some studies have noted significant declines in songbird diversity, for example, in over-browsed areas. An increase in deer-vehicle collisions is also related to an increase in overall deer numbers. Lyme disease is more prevalent in areas where deer are very abundant. We urge significant caution against limiting hunting and trapping activity on LMF properties.

Finally, the opportunity for the LMF program to leverage federal funding has never been greater. With thanks to leadership from Maine's Congressional delegation, recent passage of the Great American Outdoors Act secured permanent and full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). LWCF, which is funded by oil and gas lease revenues, was established in 1964 to assist federal, state, and local governments in the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation opportunities and land conservation, including working forests. The Great American Outdoors Act made \$900 million available annually across the country. Maine stands to draw as much as \$40 million per year of these funds, but those funds require a match, which LMF can provide. LMF is a good investment, particularly today, as it will be key to bringing a significant amount of readily-available federal funds to Maine.

For those reasons, to benefit our wildlife heritage, and more we urge the Committee to support funding for LMF.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eliza Donoghue".

Eliza Donoghue, Esq.
Director of Advocacy